

FRIENDSHIP, LOVE, AND MARRIAGE AND
THEIR RELATIONSHIP TO MY CERAMIC ART

by

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INTRODUCTION

The emotion of love is the most universal of human feelings and throughout humankind's recorded history has been the subject of songs, poetry, stories, and art. Friendship and marriage, two ancillary companions to love, should usually be included or combined together with this difficult-to-describe feeling of affection. As an inspiration for works of art in a variety of dimensions and a multitude of media, love stands among the leaders and catalysts for the creation of objects of beauty.

The representational media of painting, drawing, sculpture, and printmaking are the most natural and felicitous means of expression in regard to love and friendship; however, they are not the only paths to choose. Pottery, due to its form, technology, and color limitations, would seem the more difficult method of expressing human emotions and feelings. However, color and form have powerful abilities to elicit response and conjure up images in the eye and mind of the beholder, independent of the artist's meaning. By doing this, the potter can transcend his image as a mere craftsman in the art world.

Even though the viewer can never know all that is in the artist's mind when that person creates the work

itself, the individual viewing the art should be able to compose an opinion about form, color, composition, and technique. Once again, form and color can have a sensual, emotional, or intellectual appeal to any viewer. Most artists can deal with all reactions except indifference. Works of art are created because of a deep inner need of the artist to work wonders with his hands. A powerful secondary desire is appreciation for that creation from family, friends, and the public.

In the past fifty years, the rise in the divorce rate and the absence or cooling of love and related feelings in many relationships gives pause to some pondering the embarkation down the aisle. Not every partnership and marriage settles into an attitude of taking the other person for granted by developing a selfish, complacent rut from which a split is the inevitable end.

The bonds which I have developed with my wife have changed, grown, and strengthened over fifteen years of marriage. They have been tested by the getting-acquainted period in the first year of our partnership and have been re-evaluated, reinforced, re-examined, and tested even more by the past four years spent in graduate school. Graduate assistantships, money worries, my wife's journey to Topeka to teach, and the separations caused by inclement weather and school duties have not been easy, though all this has made our relationship stronger.

As an inspiration for my ceramic work, the love and friendship in our marriage is one of the main forces that motivates my creative energies though, of course, it is not the only one. No one can measure with accuracy the amount of influence one person can have over another. Some may even be unaware of the extent of these effects. In my own life, I am aware of this influence which is reciprocated.

We always thoroughly discuss the events of the day, our plans for the coming week, how our work is going, and our hopes and dreams for the future. In regard to my own ceramic work, sketches of proposed pottery, glaze colors, and patterns and technical details of pottery glazing and firing are shared with my spouse. To me, having a sounding board who will say what she thinks about my work is invaluable. At the same time, a supportive person who is prejudiced in your favor makes the indifference of the majority of the public toward art in general a little easier to endure.

In this paper, I propose to relate the feelings, emotions, joys, and tribulations of married life to my creation of clay objects which reflect these intangibles. Color and form, with their emotional and intellectual attributes in relation to the pottery I make, should also be worthy of consideration. The influence of artists in other media will be the next topic. Last of all, several

of my pieces will be discussed and related to the main focus of this paper: the ability of form and color to express or elicit emotion and the force and meaning given to my pottery by the love, happiness, and friendship I share with my wife and companion, Ronda.

THE NATURE OF LOVE

Love for another person. What is it? Does it stay constant throughout life? How does it affect other aspects of a person's life? Is it a source of inspiration for creativity and does the creative person always turn to emotional and sexual feelings as one of the means of creating art, music, poetry, or writing?

Love is not something that happens overnight or at first sight across a crowded room but is slowly developed through the trial and error methods of any interpersonal relationship. Seeing or meeting someone you like and want to get to know better is usually the first step; love only comes later or sometimes not at all.

The word love itself comes from the Sanskrit word lubhyat which means "he desires".¹ This would appear to indicate that it is the male who first sees and desires the other person. In ancient Greece, the prevailing thought was that the woman was incapable of attaining the lofty status required for love. The Greeks saw two sides to love; eros, or carnal love, and agape, a spiritual and emotional form of love.² As might be apparent to the reader, this could be an allusion to a homosexual type of love. Marriage was for the creation of children; love and affection were found outside the home.

Jewish scholars and theologians condemned this practice, as did Christianity when it too formulated a religious doctrine. Love of God alone could be "pure", not so the imperfection of love between man and woman.³ Priests and nuns took vows that, in effect, married them to the Church. This was viewed as superior to the merely physical marriage between those not in the church hierarchy. The increased emphasis on womanly purity aided in the formulation and promotion of the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception and the rise in the status of Mary, mother of Jesus.⁴

The Cult of the Virgin Mary gave rise to and aided in prolonging the life of the Code of Chivalry and Courtly Love. When the Crusaders embarked to the Holy Land to free it from the infidel's domination, the nobles' wives were left in charge of their feudal domains. The Lady of the Manor was given the kind of homage and deference usually due the Lord, who was now far away in a foreign land waging war against the "heathens".⁵ Courtly love, which in its ideal form, was platonic, or at least surviving literature and art so depict it, elevated a woman's status to that of a semi-divine creature. The unfortunate knight, a Don Quixote of trials and tribulations, was expected to pay court to his lady, writing poems, and performing deeds of derring-do which that proud beauty could disdain or praise at will. She

even could be totally unaware of the affection of her hapless paramour and ignorant of his heroic feats; however, the Code of Chivalry demanded he do them.⁶

In my case, no super-human actions done for love alone are evident, though the tendency to see in the beloved, not only beauty but qualities seemingly possessed by no others or at least not in the same degree, come to mind. To have someone who sees you as a worthy person with talents and admirable human qualities that beg to be shared with others is flattering to one's ego. In most marriages, the feeling that the partner has embodied in him or her the best that human nature has to offer may disappear soon after marriage or weaken as the years pass. In our relationship, the sameness of constantly being around each other and increasingly feeling that we are ever more unchanging and satisfied with the status quo has not occurred.

We view our marriage as an equal partnership with each of us sharing roles and duties that are non-traditional in most marriages. Though it has been fifteen years since our wedding, many family members, friends, and acquaintances have said we still act like newlyweds. They easily notice the great love and friendship we show toward one another and wish for the same relationship for themselves. This is not meant to be boastful but merely to illustrate how interpersonal

relationships can influence all aspects of a person's life, including the artistic.

The influence of other individuals has also been crucial in regards to my artistic development. The Japanese-American sculptor, Isamu Noguchi, and the Russian painter, Wassily Kandinsky, though neither was a worker in clay, have been inspirational to me.

Born in Moscow in 1866, Kandinsky studied law and economics at the University of Moscow. At the age of thirty, the young lawyer refused a professorship of law at the University of Dorpat in Estonia. Instead he decided to pursue a painting career after viewing an exhibition of French art in the Russian capital.⁷

Since I decided to come back to school to pursue a Master's degree at the advanced age of 37, I feel some kinship with the Russian who gave up a secure job to lead the precarious life of an artist, not sure of public acceptance. Kandinsky's concern with various theories regarding spiritualism, representation, and his use of geometric hard and soft-edged forms which dance and float across the picture plane have some bearing on my choice of full-bodied, rounded forms which are more feminine than the hard-edged, angular, masculine pieces done earlier in graduate school. To me, it is important to make use of the qualities that each sex shares with the other and not ignore these "masculine" or "feminine" impulses or

feelings because they may not conform to societal expectations and mores. With artists, it is easier to sublimate these feelings into their work and express in subtle or camouflaged ways the feelings, thoughts, and desires usually disguised in speech and repressed in actions in public. As the artist's true meaning may not be clear even to himself, the viewer can still see something to enjoy in form, color, and texture, while at the same time being unsure or ignorant of the artist's ultimate intent.

Like Kandinsky, who may have been lost in the above digression, I feel that learning about and making art is a life-long process that does not end when one receives the sheepskin at the end of undergraduate or graduate school. Kandinsky's constant delving into the reasons why one makes art, what motivates the artist, and his desire for growth and change not for its own sake are all qualities that I wish to emulate when the pressures of graduate school end, and I embark on a new voyage of discovery in life.

Wassily Kandinsky spent most of his life as a foreign national in Germany. After forming Der Blaue Reiter with the German painter, Franz Marc, whose career was ended by his death in battle in World War I, Kandinsky was able to organize exhibitions of other like-minded artists such as the Spaniard, Pablo Picasso, the Frenchman, Georges

Braque, the Alsatian, Jean Arp, and the Swiss, Paul Klee.
Kandinsky stated, "I value only these artists, who really
are artists, that is, who consciously or unconsciously, in
an entirely original form, embody the expression of their
inner life; who work only for this end and cannot work
⁹
otherwise."⁹

Space does not permit further examination of
Kandinsky's long and varied career. Born and educated in
Russia, he spent most of his mature life in or around
Munich, Germany. He reluctantly left his adopted homeland
for France when Adolf Hitler came to power in 1933.
Kandinsky died in Paris on 13 December, 1944, a few months
after that city's liberation by Allied troops. Only a few
months later, the war in Europe ended with the Germans'
¹⁰
surrender.

The other artist whose forms, life, and ideas have
influenced me is the sculptor, Isamu Noguchi, born in 1904
in Los Angeles of a Japanese father and American mother.
Noguchi was inspired by an expatriate American sculptor,
Alexander Calder, and a Spanish painter, Joan Miro, and he
worked as a young assistant to the Rumanian, Constantin
Brancusi, whose polished bronze "Bird in Space" still
continues to amaze me.

The works of Noguchi that feature geometric shapes
such as squares standing balanced on a corner, rounded
forms with both rough and smooth sides and edges, and

organic marble constructions with the contrasting colors being juxtaposed to give a candy-stripe effect have proved inspirational to me. In my search for a smooth, rounded form, I have made pieces using alternating shiny and matt glazes which combine to suggest the earth and water, the security and joy of love, and the sadness that is sometimes associated with maintaining a relationship with another person.

Noguchi's sculpture, by virtue of the fact that some of it is meant to be placed outside, is oftentimes monumental in nature. Therefore, it is of a scale much larger than I would wish to make. Nevertheless, it is his form that again has the most appeal. Spheres, cylinders, and ovals are shapes which can be changed slightly for infinite numbers of variations that may be used repeatedly with different glazes to give completely dissimilar effects.

My Cherokee-Shawnee Indian heritage has been the source of another method of construction for pottery: the use of long, rolled coils, pinched together, and smoothed into the desired shape. This is combined with other sections thrown on the wheel, a relatively modern "turn" of events. The coil method is slow and methodical which appeals to my traditional side. By using this technique, I can also feel a continuity with the many generations of nameless Indian craftsmen who made ceremonial and

utilitarian objects on the North American continent before the arrival of the white man.

Five works will be discussed and compared to illustrate the growth of my technical knowledge and increasing confidence in the ability to create personal statements in clay.

UNION: PURITY AND COOLNESS, WOMAN AND MAN

The first piece to be discussed is by far the largest as it is two feet tall, two feet long, and ten inches deep. The shape is not related to the word "union" itself but represents the two halves of our marriage; two individuals. The feminine side is the more rounded section of the piece, the masculine the more elongated. The deep, almost royal blue is the cooler hue, and this coolness makes it the more masculine. The organic patches of white are more feminine in nature, while green is the color of growth and life, the small specks and islands of brown are a hint of the earth which sustains all life. The union itself consists of the bonding of two souls and two lives in an eternal marriage, our marriage.



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ARMS OF LOVE

The second largest piece in the exhibit is the Arms of Love, a round, full-bodied work, wheel-thrown and hand-built with two curved appendages that begin on opposite sides of the piece and disappear behind it. A pale blue/white color is meant to symbolize the ephemeral qualities of marriage, the intangibles of a life-long relationship getting used to the idiosyncrasies of another person. The full-bodied shape is again the more feminine form with accents provided by a light spraying of iron oxide mostly near the top; it is also in various other places, though not as prominent as near the top.



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THE LOTUS BLOSSOM

The lotus is a symbol of long life in the Orient. What better way to spend this long life than with someone special? The rounded feminine shape is combined with a semi-shiny surface. The several different glazes sprayed one over the other have made for a rough, pebble-like surface in certain areas. A darker sea-green and wine-red are the dominant colors; the two contrasting colors symbolizing the male and female halves of our marriage. Two minor accent colors occur in various places; a lighter green under the two dominant colors and small sections that have subtle hints of yellow/tan showing the bright, joyous parts of our marriage.



The lamp shape is the light provided by our parents to show us the true path to walk through life.

Remembering childhood brings back memories of a time of playing outside and getting as dirty as possible. Parents were no help as they always wanted you to clean up and look nice. The patched section works well as a symbol of all the scrapes, cuts, bruises, and injuries of teeter-totters, jungle gyms, roller skating, rope jumping, bike riding, hurt feelings, and broken hearts. The somber hues and green and orange bright areas further remind one of the swiftly changing moods of childhood.



Last of all is a piece that has great appeal for both of us: a circular-shaped form, open at the top. What the viewer will notice first is the obvious phallic shape of one side and the breast form of the other. The shape of this piece, along with its title, makes the viewer cognizant of its sexual connotations. Every couple is well aware that sex is part of marriage. The green is a symbol of the hope both of us have that our love and friendship stay "evergreen". The silver/gray color is a metaphor for the shining qualities of our marriage. Through our efforts, these good feelings will not "tarnish" but will forever remain bright. The rough, bumpy surface, like the moon, can conceal or reveal personal or physical attributes which are sometimes in the eye of the beholder. Every moon has its dark side, and in marriage, we get to see the good and bad characteristics of the other person.



CONCLUSION

The many intimate qualities of my art work dictate a more personal slant to this paper. It would seem to be a compendium of personal opinion rather than facts that can be documented. Many today view marriage as an archaic institution that is destined to be discarded. Ronda and I do not feel this way and view marriage as an adventure that needs the total commitment of both people for it to work. It is not living "happily ever after" after saying "I do" but more like a job that must be worked at diligently to make it succeed.

Our marriage has lasted because we learned early in our relationship to care for the other person as we do for ourselves and to respect the other's viewpoint. We see no need to give up after a disagreement about friends, money, relatives, or events in our lives. We believe it is important to stand firm for what we want out of life while being aware that there is a need for giving and compromising. Our fifteen years together have influenced all aspects of our lives due to the happiness that we share. We can only hope this relationship lasts forever and improves with age.

NOTES

- 1 James Leslie McCary, Freedom and Growth in Marriage (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1980), p. 146.
- 2 Ibid., p. 155.
- 3 Ibid., p. 155 & 156.
- 4 Ibid., p. 156.
- 5 Kenneth Clark, Civilisation (New York: Harper and Row, 1969), p. 64.
- 6 Ibid., p. 68.
- 7 H. H. Arnason, History of Modern Art (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1976), p. 172.
- 8 Wassily Kandinsky, Concerning the Spiritual in Art (New York: Dover Publications, 1977), p. VII.
- 9 Ibid., p. VII.
- 10 Will Grohmann, Wassily Kandinsky Life and Work (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1958), pp. 246-48.

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ABSTRACT

The emotion of love has been the catalyst for songs, poetry, stories, and art for centuries. Through the making of ceramic sculpture and vessels, I have found a relationship to and am influenced by my own marriage and the love and friendship I feel for my wife.

Color and form with their ability to have varying connotations for me have been a consideration in my work. Since the connection between my marriage and the ceramics made in graduate school is a personal one, sources that reinforce and illustrate this point of view will be cited that will make these feelings clear to the reader.

Love is a universal human emotion, though only the western romantic chivalric traditions which are part of my heritage are pertinent to my art.

My Indian heritage with its long tradition of coiled, hand-built pottery has been a continuing source of inspiration and influence to me. Wassily Kandinsky, an abstract Russian painter, and Isamu Noguchi, a Japanese-American sculptor, with their geometric, dancing forms, shapes, and colors are the other side of the spectrum of influence from the more traditional Indian art.

My most recent work makes use of a variety of colors,

tones, and shapes. As in all things in our marriage, my wife, Ronda, has had a great deal of input into my use of form and color. This influence has not been total, however, as we each have our own favorite colors, forms, and degrees of light and dark.

The importance of our relationship, I believe, is reflected in my pottery as well as in other aspects of my life. This thesis will illustrate these points.